News for Immediate Release

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DWR-Rice Farmers Resolve Water Temperature Issue

OROVILLE -- Rice growers near Oroville Dam are benefiting from a creative fiscal solution to a water temperature problem.

The State Department of Water Resources (DWR), which operates the dam, announced that a $2.4 million payment to several water districts is going to rice growers in those districts, compensating for complaints that Oroville water releases were too cold for ideal rice growing. Funding comes from State Water Project contractors.

The payment was made this month to local water districts receiving water from the dam's Thermalito Afterbay. The districts have water rights that predate operation of the California State Water Project (SWP). Oroville Dam is the SWP's key storage facility in Northern California.

The payments arise from an agreement among DWR and the districts. It resolved concerns on the cold water farming impacts of Afterbay deliveries. Water needs to be cold to safeguard fish downstream. But the districts voiced concern over cold water's negative impacts on rice yields.

DWR and the districts reached agreement on the issue collaboratively, using jointly developed data and

analysis. The initial payment covers several years of concern and will be followed by annual payments, based on measured rice yield impacts and relevant market pricing.

“This agreement illustrates DWR’s desire to find reasonable ways of balancing the sometimes conflicting benefits of our operation,” said DWR Acting Deputy Director Carl Torgersen. “Tax money is not involved because this solution is funded by the water contractors who are charged for SWP operations.”

Districts participating in the agreement include the Western Canal Water District, Richvale Irrigation District and Biggs-West Gridley Water District. Butte Water District and Sutter Extension Water District have future options to participate.

Estimation of cold water crop impacts involves direct measurement of rice yield loss using GPS-equipped harvesters, spectral analysis of satellite imagery to determine areas of impact and economic analysis of the value of rice. Under direction of a technical panel, valuation of the lost production is then determined.

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The Department of Water Resources operates and maintains the State Water Project, provides dam safety and flood control and inspection services, assists local water districts in water management and water conservation planning, and plans for future statewide water needs.

Contact the DWR Public Affairs Office for more information about DWR's water activities.